

In the 1830s, the concept of mass media emerged with the penny press, which enabled newspapers to be sold for a single cent. This development increased the accessibility of information, making sure that news also reached America's lower classes. As technology progressed, with the penny press evolving into the radio and eventually the television, the reach and influence of media has only increased. Now, the most commonly consumed media is social media, which includes a plethora of platforms including but not limited to Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Social media has proved time and time again to be the most powerful of any of its predecessors, breaking language barriers, surpassing cultural differences, and fostering connections among people throughout the world. It has an enormous ability to rally people for a common cause, and its potential to bring peace is extraordinary. However, social media, just like any other powerful weapon, also has an alarming ability to cultivate hatred and destruction. Over the past few years, we have witnessed violence and resentment fueled by influential figures on social media, who have continuously and unrelentingly promoted hateful lies and messages. Social media, although a tool with immense capability to create peace, will never reach its potential to do good if accountability and responsibility is not emphasized.

One event that has yet to leave the consciousnesses of Americans, even after more than two years, is the January 6th insurrection. On this day, Trump supporters mobbed the U.S Capitol building, resulting in not just \$1.5 million in property damage, but in the deaths of five police officers. This tragedy was incited by President Donald Trump's tweet, in which he told supporters: "Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election. Big protest in D.C on January 6th. Be there, will be wild". Using his enormous influence on Twitter, Trump was able to rally his far-right supporters around the proven lie that the election was stolen and that voter

fraud was evident throughout the country. And when the damage was done, Trump claimed that there was not a “single shred of evidence that [he] in any way intended or wanted violence at our Capitol”. While his lack of accountability is astounding, the problems with accountability and responsibility do not stop at him. Twitter too, has made this deficiency evident. Although they have claimed that the company is “clear-eyed about [their] role in the broader information ecosystem”, they failed to derail Trump when his first lies about the election began to circulate. In fact, they even considered adopting stricter policies after Trump’s failure to denounce white-supremacist Proud Boys group, but ultimately decided against it. And even if Twitter starts taking initiative and changing their policy, this question still stands: how did Twitter let the situation get to this point? How is it that a majorly influential figure is able to dispense a dangerous lie to his millions of followers - many of whom belong to racist or extremist hate groups - on a regulated platform?

Without policies that can allow for civil and responsible discussion, social media’s role in promoting peace will continue to be stifled. Lies and hatred will continue to overwhelm voices of reason, and unrest will continue to ensue. If we want to use social media to promote peace, we must first ensure that our ecosystem is free of pollutants.

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